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Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Changing? The Culture of Sport Hazing in the 21st Century-January 2018

Project Summary

Hazing is a complex issue that is entangled in the culture and tradition of Canadian University sport. Hazing is defined as an event created to establish a team's social hierarchy by humiliating, degrading, abusing and/or endangering newcomers regardless of a person's willingness to participate in order to reinforce their social status on the team. Anecdotal reports and growing research indicate that hazing persists among university athletes, yet to date, we did not have foundational data to provide a baseline for understanding hazing trends across Canada.

This study was a multi-year initiative to explore the prevalence and nature of hazing among student athletes within Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS)-now U Sports. Specifically, the study:

- A) Investigated the prevalence and nature of hazing behaviours among student athletes in the CIS with a particular focus on gender rates,
- B) Investigated existing strategies within athletic programs to manage hazing activities among university sponsored teams;
- C) Examined policies for the development of strategies to enhance policy effectiveness;
- D) Provide research-based strategies to sport administrators for responding to and preventing hazing among CIS student athletes; and
- E) Provide a template for the transfer of knowledge by which other sport organizations such as secondary schools, community sport or regional/national teams can address the hazing within their programs.

Athletes in the current study indicated that common hazing practices included those of public humiliation and degradation. Moreover, athletes reported that coaches were not only aware of hazing behaviours, but also present while hazing behaviours occurred. Athletes who experienced hazing perceived more positive outcomes of hazing than negative, and did not report hazing incidents because they believed experiencing hazing was part of being a member of the team. Finally, only a small percentage of athletes had participated in hazing prevention workshops. Taken together, the results provide evidence that hazing in Canadian athletics is highly prevalent, and that more hazing prevention interventions are needed for not only athletes but also coaches.

Research methods

This study was a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) endeavor.

Stage One was the survey component of data collection which included web-based surveys in French and English of student athletes at Canadian universities. This consisted of a random sample population of U Sports student athletes across all sports played, which includes 52 institutions and 21 sports with men and women combined (www.universitysport.ca).

Stage Two was the interview component which included follow-up interviews with individual on-campus student athletes at sample institutions and individual on-campus interviews with coaching staff and athletic administrators at sample institutions across Canada. Individual interviews (of approximately 60-120 minutes in duration) were conducted from a regional sample structure to represent the breadth of Universities across Canada, and were conducted in equal numbers of men and women student athletes and coaches, across sports.

Research results

Stage one

A total of 434 U Sports (formerly known as Canadian Interuniversity Sport) athletes from various universities across Canada participated in the current study. Of these participants, 201 were male and 233 were female. Eighty-four percent of participants were between the ages of 18-22 years, 13.60% between the ages of 23-26 years, 1.20% between the ages of 27-30 years, and 0.70% older than 31 years. The racial and ethnic make-up of the sample varied, with 4.80% of athletes identifying as Asian, 5.30% as African Canadian, 1.30% as First Nations, 1.10% as Hispanic or Latino, 1.10% as Pacific Islander, 81.80% as White, and 3.70% as other. Approximately 2% of survey respondents chose not to disclose their race/ethnicity. The majority of participants were full-time students (97.56%), while a small portion were part-time students (2.44%). Thirty percent of students were first-year undergraduates, 21.47% were second-year undergraduates, 18.66% were third-year undergraduates, 15.58% were fourth-year undergraduates, 9.72% were fifth- and sixth-year undergraduates, and 3.92% were enrolled in graduate studies.

Participants belonged to various varsity-level (93.50%) and club-level (13.10%) sports, with football (40.50%), soccer (9.25%), and ice hockey (9.25%) being the most popular sports for males, and basketball (18.03%), soccer (17.17%), and rugby (12.02%) being the most popular sports for females. Athletes were also asked to rate their overall experience as an athlete on their team. The majority (72.53%) of athletes reported their experience as mostly positive, 24.24% reported their experience as both positive and negative, and 1.34% reported their experience as mostly negative.

Hazing Experiences

To assess athletes' experiences with hazing behaviours, a list of 22 hazing behaviours was presented to the athletes. For each behaviour, athletes were asked to indicate whether the respective behaviour: (a) happened to them; (b) happened to others on the team; (c) happened to them and others on the team; or (d) never happened to them or others on the team (see Table 1). Results showed that 57.8% (n = 251) of athletes indicated that at least one of the hazing behaviours happened to them and others on the team. Frequent hazing behaviours that happened to athletes and others on their team included: wearing embarrassing clothing (30.20%); singing or chanting in public at an unrelated sport event, practice, or game (28.10%); attending a skit night or roast (18.20%); drinking or eating vile concoctions (15.90%); being yelled, screamed, or cursed at by others (15.70%); associating with specific people and not others (11.10%); and acting as a personal servant to other members (10.40%). Females (56.57%) reported experiencing more hazing behaviours than males (43.43%).

Self-reported hazing. Athletes were asked to indicate whether they had ever been hazed. Of the athletes who reported experiencing at least one of the hazing behaviours that met the definition of hazing, 59% reported that they had been hazed, 34.30% reported that they had not been hazed, and 6.80% were unsure. Participants who had self-identified as having been hazed reported that hazing occurred across a range of different organizations, including varsity sport teams (86.08%), intramural club sports (20.93%), bands (20.62%), performing arts organizations (20.10%), military organizations (20%), other types of organizations (15.15%), and recreational clubs (9.48%). In terms of athletes' involvement in hazing others, most indicated that they had never participated in hazing someone else (74.42%), and never participated in hazing activities as part of their team (70.55%).

Knowledge of Hazing

From the list of hazing behaviours that were provided, 38.02% of athletes indicated they were aware of such behaviours prior to joining the team, 48.34% indicated they were unaware of such behaviours, and 13.55% indicated they were somewhat aware. Fifty-three percentage of athletes had heard of members from other teams at their university engaging in hazing behaviours, and 28.89% had witnessed members from other teams engaging in hazing. Of the athletes who experienced at least one hazing behaviour, 60.60% reported that coaches were not aware, present, or involved in the hazing behaviours, while 33.90% reported that coaches were aware of the behaviours but not present, 33.71% reported that coaches were present during the behaviour, and 4.54% reported that coaches were involved in the behaviour. Additionally, 67.40% reported that team alumni were not present during any hazing behaviours.

Perceptions of the Nature of Hazing

Participants who reported experiencing at least one hazing behaviour indicated that the behaviours primarily took place off-campus in a private residence (74.90%), off-campus in a public space (25.82%), and on-campus in an outdoor public space (16.41%). Athletes also reported that hazing behaviours occurred during the day (7.25%), during the evening (59.36%), and both during the day and the evening (33.39%). Hazing behaviours primarily occurred on a weekend free of competition (77.61%) as opposed to on a weekday (12.27%) or on a weekend or weekday in which the team was competing (10.12%). In terms of social media, photos of hazing behaviours were not generally posted on a public web space, as approximately 80% of athletes reported that they have never posted pictures of their

team's hazing activities online. When asked if others had ever posted pictures of hazing activities on a public web space, 55.46% of athletes responded no, 25.58% responded yes, and 19% were unsure.

Attitudes Toward Hazing

Participants reported speaking about their or others' hazing experience to a friend (77.13%), another member of their team (67.09%), and a team captain (41.67%). In contrast, Alternatively, participants indicated that they did not speak to a clergy member (88.13%), a counselor (86.85%), or a coach/advisor (79.20%) about their hazing experience. As a result of participating in hazing behaviours, 63.02% of participants felt more belonged to the team and 18.65% felt a sense of accomplishment. A smaller portion of athletes experienced negative feelings as a result of participating in hazing, including looking forward to their chance to do it to others (19.92%), feeling stressed (10.84%), feeling humiliated/degraded (9.08%), and feeling guilty (7.97%).

Of the participants who had self-identified as having been hazed, the majority of athletes did not report the hazing behaviours to university authorities (88.14%). A large portion of athletes indicated they did not report hazing events because they felt that experiencing hazing was part of being a member of a team (75.67%). Other athletes did not report hazing events because they: (a) were fearful that other team members would find out they reported the event, (b) were worried about being harmed by their teammates if they find out they reported the event (12.58%). Athletes also indicated that they did not want to get their team members in trouble (27.42%).

Exposure to Hazing Prevention and Intervention Strategies

The majority of the sample indicated that their team had never been provided with a list of ideas for positive team building activities as an alternative to hazing (55%). Most athletes indicated that they were told of anti-hazing policies during new student orientation (60.46%), and prior to joining the team or organization (62.53%). A small percentage of participants reported attending hazing prevention workshops presented by adults and peers, 22.30% and 12.21%, respectively.

Discussion

The results revealed that over half of the athletes indicated that they as well as others on their team experienced at least one hazing behaviour. Over one third of athletes indicated that coaches were aware of hazing behaviours, while another one third of athletes reported that coaches were present during the behaviours. Results also indicated that hazing behaviours primarily occurred off-campus in a private residence, on weekends free of competition, and at night. The majority of athletes who were exposed to hazing reported experiencing more positive feelings rather than negative feelings. A large portion of athletes did not report hazing incidents to university authorities because athletes believed that being exposed to hazing was part of being a member of the team. Finally, the results showed that most athletes learned about hazing policies during new student orientation and prior to joining the team.

Findings of the current study illustrated that hazing is prevalent in Canadian university athletics, with 58% of athletes experiencing at least one hazing behaviour. Interestingly, however, this is the lowest

rate of hazing noted in any research study examining hazing among university athletes. Similar to past research in the US (Allan & Madden, 2012) some of the most common types of hazing behaviours reported by athletes in the current study included public humiliation and degradation, suggesting that types of hazing behaviours remain relatively consistent across various student membership groups (e.g., athletes, academic clubs, performing arts). Further, when participants who reported experiencing hazing were asked whether they had ever been hazed, only 60% self-identified as being a victim of hazing. This particular finding underscores the confusion among athletes regarding what constitutes and defines hazing, and is a consistent phenomenon noted in other hazing research.

Approximately 34% of athletes in the current study indicated that coaches were aware of hazing behaviour, but were not present. This finding is comparable to past research which has shown that 25% of college students believed their coaches/advisors had knowledge of the hazing. More alarmingly was the finding that 34% of athletes indicated that coaches were present during hazing behaviours. Taken together, the perceptions athletes had regarding their coaches' knowledge of and presence during hazing parallels past research showing that the majority of athletes reported that their coaches allowed and tolerated hazing and some athletes even indicated that their coaches encouraged hazing by telling athletes whom to haze. Interestingly, the findings from the current study, coupled with past research, provide some evidence that athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behaviours pertaining to hazing do not coincide with coaches' overt attitudes toward hazing. To illustrate, Caperchione and Holman (2004) found that the majority of university coaches disapproved of hazing practices, and believed that athletes should challenge, reject, and even report hazing practices.

Coaches even went as far as stating that athletes who refuse to participate in hazing rituals and ceremonies should be respected and admired by their peers. This notion of newcomers challenging and rejecting hazing practices, and subsequently being respected and even admired for doing so is considerably inconsistent with both the literature and the findings of this study. Additionally, it is extremely discouraging that some coaches may feign ignorance of any knowledge or may be present during hazing behaviours given that such behaviours support hazing practices, reinforce team hierarchy, and indirectly (and potentially directly) harm the welfare of the newcomer. Therefore, given coaches can play a vital role in the hazing process, they should not only develop and communicate strict team policies against hazing, but also engage in behaviours that support these policies.

Results of the present study suggest that athletes' perceptions of the nature of hazing appear to be somewhat different than those outlined in previous research. For example, in the current study athletes indicated that hazing primarily occurred off-campus in a private residence, during weekends free of competition, and at night. They also reported that photos of hazing behaviours were not generally posted on social media outlets. However, students in Allan and Madden's (2012) US study reported that hazing often occurred in a public space on campus and during the day, and that photos of hazing behaviours were posted online by either themselves or others on their team/organization. The reason for these varying findings may be due to the difference in populations sampled in the current study (student-athletes) to that sampled in Allan and Madden's study (e.g., student-athletes, members of performing arts group, members of academic clubs, etc.). Athletes of teams, unlike members of student organizations, may spend more time together (e.g., attending practices at night)

and therefore may have more opportunity to engage in hazing practices. Additionally, research has shown that athletes (along with members of fraternities and sororities) are more susceptible to experiencing hazing than other group memberships (Allan & Madden, 2012). Consequently, there has been a growing interest among practitioners and researchers with respect to implementing more effective hazing prevention efforts and stronger disciplinary policies within university athletic programs. In the current study, it is possible that athletes took several precautionary measures to avoid “getting caught” (e.g., not posting photos online) and potentially receiving some form of punishment, thereby feeding into the secrecy culture of hazing.

Similar to past US research, the majority of athletes in the current study perceived significantly more positive outcomes of hazing than negative. This finding suggests that athletes may consider many of the hazing behaviours as harmless and appropriate, especially when their teammates approve and support such behaviours. For instance, if a newcomer participates in a hazing behaviour that appears seemingly innocent (e.g., wearing embarrassing clothes) and does not perceive this experience as harmful, then they may be more likely to perceive hazing as a positive experience. In fact, nearly two thirds of athletes in the present study reported that they felt more part of the team after participating in hazing behaviours. This perspective appears to be consistent with the well-established belief that acquiescing to hazing practices leads to full membership into the group. Athletes might have justified their willingness to be hazed as important because of the subsequent award (e.g., membership). Further, the results showed that the majority of athletes who participated in hazing did not report the behaviours to university authorities. The primary reason for not reporting hazing behaviours was athletes’ perception that experiencing hazing was part of being a team member. This finding illustrates the extent to which hazing is a deep-seated tradition, and mirrors earlier hazing research showing that engaging in hazing behaviours is considered to be a normal aspect of sport. Athletes in the current study also indicated that they did not report hazing incidents because they were fearful of the negative consequences (e.g., being harmed and being treated as an outsider). Similarly, current and former athletes from a US study indicated that they were unwilling to speak out against hazing as it would lead to greater humiliation and alienation from the team. Collectively, these findings reinforce the need to educate athletes on the dangers of hazing and empower athletes to stand up against hazing traditions. We suggest that case studies, scenarios, and role playing could be used to teach athletes how to prevent and intervene hazing incidents. Based on the present study’s findings, the prevention strategies recommendation would also be in concert with coaches and administrators to enhance effectiveness.

While the majority of athletes in the current study noted that they had been told of anti-hazing policies during new student orientation as well as prior to joining their team, only a small percentage indicated that they had participated in hazing prevention workshops. Additionally, findings revealed that most athletes had never been provided with ideas of alternative, positive initiation activities. These findings highlight the need to adopt more proactive approaches to hazing prevention efforts, such as conducting workshops and team discussions. More specifically, sport stakeholders (e.g., administrators and sport psychology consultants) could use workshops and team discussions as platforms to challenge, diminish, and replace hazing traditions. In collaboration with coaches, stakeholders could use workshops to educate athletes about hazing by identifying hazing as a problem, discussing the dangers of hazing, and explaining how they (the athletes) could play an

important role in eliminating hazing initiations. Moreover, through team discussions, stakeholders could collaborate with athletes by brainstorming positive initiation activities (e.g., cooperative team games and excursions). Such positive initiation activities could serve as alternatives to traditional degrading, humiliating, and harmful hazing initiations, while at the same time foster group cohesion, a sense of social identity, and strong interpersonal relationships. In fact, results from this study found that the idea of implementing alternative orientations (e.g., rock climbing and canoe tripping) with male and female athletes could lead to numerous outcomes such as enhanced group cohesion, diminished team hierarchies, and improved group identity and be a replacement for current hazing practices.

Due to ethical reasons, coaches were responsible for forwarding their athletes the study's invitation email. Thus, it is possible that some coaches consciously decided not to forward the email to their athletes as an effort to maintain the culture of silence around hazing. On a similar note, while over 1000 athletes agreed to participate in the current study, more than half did not complete the survey. Of course, numerous factors may have influenced this incompleteness rate. Given the nature of the topic (hazing) it is possible that athletes felt uncomfortable detailing their involvement in hazing, despite the fact that anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

(Please see the ppt for Stage two results)

Policy implications

We recommend that our findings be used to make recommendations for an effective, proactive policy that supports the development of positive values among sport teams, including a clear process for investigating and prosecuting violations related to hazing with clear sanctions or consequences. Such a policy can then strengthen the voice of participants and contribute to change from within. The targeted groups should be governing bodies, U Sports, individual universities, high school sport, provincial regulating bodies across sport, and club sport organizations.

The findings can be used to promote the implementation of effective policies and training programs that address the dangers of hazing, augmenting the likelihood of athlete retention by creating a social and competitive setting where athletes want to spend their time and efforts and families want to encourage and support their achievements. The success of the project is dependent upon the shared outcomes of the study and the use of these findings in the development of recommendations and educational materials to be widely distributed. Some of the specific initiatives to achieve this include: multiple press conferences to release findings; formal written reports with findings and recommendations for participant institutions and for general public (via paper and website); shared findings via presentations at national meetings or conferences, some of which might include U Sports Annual General meetings, Regional general meetings, Coaching Association of Canada, community sport organizations such as the OHL, North American Society for Sport Management and the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport.

A further recommendation is to develop and distribute workshop and educational materials based on findings and a curriculum that can be implemented by administrators (similar to mandated drug education for athletes) and educators in universities, to be modeled by other similar organizations such as secondary schools. The information generated may be sufficient for the co-researchers to develop book proposal(s) for an academic/research audience, or a general audience of community coaches, administrators and parents as well as generating articles for scholarly forums such as journals and newsletters.

Set up multi-media platforms, Facebook pages and twitter to educate and communicate with teams, coaches and athletes as well as the governing organizations to Create a more transparent approach and conversation regarding hazing.

Next steps

Researchers might consider qualitatively examining perceptions of hazing among athletes, coaches, and athletic directors, with a particular focus on investigating existing and future hazing prevention strategies and interventions. This information could inform researchers and practitioners of the key ingredients needed in order to develop cost-effective, practical, and successful strategies and interventions. Investigating the coaching culture would also advance the literature on hazing in athletics. Additionally, researchers have noted that mentoring between current and new team members could serve as a positive socialization experience and could facilitate a positive, healthy team environment. In fact, recent research suggests that approximately 40% of Canadian intercollegiate athletes have never been peer-mentored by another athlete. The benefits of being peer-mentored by another athlete include increased satisfaction with teammates, as well as enhanced confidence and performance and a willingness to mentor other athletes. Coaches of teams notorious for upholding hazing traditions could attempt to facilitate an environment where veteran athletes are encouraged to mentor rookie athletes. This approach might help to reduce the prevalence of hazing in sport teams. Determining whether mentoring relationships between athletes would prevent hazing incidents warrants future investigation. This mentorship could also be extended to high school and club sport (feeder systems for university sport) to target high school athletes to educate and involve them in discussions and positive orientations to start cultural change prior to university and have more athletes stay in sport in general.

Research should also be conducted on the effectiveness of alternative interventions such as rock climbing and outdoor adventure based education to change the culture of hazing on teams.

Lastly, an important aspect of this phenomena that should be researched is the feeder system. Little is known what goes on with teams and athletes in Canada prior to arriving at University although US research indicated a high percentage of students experience hazing.

Key stakeholders and benefits

The Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education and sport organizations (e.g., U Sports, Sport Canada NSOs, Sport Manitoba, Canada West, Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations, Coaching Association of Canada, community sport organizations such as the OHL, North American Society for Sport Management and the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport.